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State Emergency and Health Officials Respond to Freeze Warnings across California

SACRAMENTO – In response to forecasts for freezing temperatures and cold winds in many parts of California, officials with the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) and the California Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) today urged Californians to prepare themselves and their family members for the possible effects of the inclement weather.

"Exposure to cold can cause injury or serious illness such as frostbite or hypothermia," said Dr. Mark Horton, State Public Health Officer. "Knowing what to do is an important part of protecting your health and the health of others. By being prepared and taking preventive actions in times of extremely cold weather, we can all reduce the risk of weather-related health problems."

OES Director Henry Renteria agreed, saying, "The safety of all Californians is our utmost concern. The National Weather Service forecast is a reminder that Californians need to prepare for weather-related emergencies as well as earthquakes, fires and other hazards."

Horton and Renteria urged Californians to take action today to reduce their risk of health-related problems and property damage. They also stressed the importance of checking on family members and neighbors who are elderly or have special needs.

Actions that can be taken to help protect against freezing temperatures include:

1) Preparing your home and family

- Review and update your family emergency plan.
- Replenish your emergency supply kits including battery-operated radio and flashlights.
- Have extra blankets on hand.
- Have a plan for meeting the needs of infants, children, seniors and those with disabilities.
- Winterize your house, barn, shed or any other structure that may provide shelter for your family, neighbors, livestock or equipment. Clear rain gutters; repair roof leaks and cut away tree branches that could fall on a house or other structure during a storm.
- Maintain a sufficient supply of heating fuel.
- Insulate pipes and allow faucets to drip a little during cold weather to avoid freezing.

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- Keep fire extinguishers on hand, and make sure everyone in your house knows how to use them. House fires pose an additional risk, as people turn to alternate heating sources without taking the necessary safety precautions.
- **Do NOT bring heating devices into the home that are intended for outdoor use**, such as barbecues and other cooking equipment or other fuel burning devices. These items can produce deadly carbon monoxide.
- Learn how to shut off water valves (in case a pipe bursts).
- Hire a contractor to check the structural ability of the roof to sustain unusually heavy weight from the accumulation of snow - or water, if drains on flat roofs do not work.

2) Dressing for the Weather

- Wear several layers of loose fitting, lightweight, warm clothing rather than one layer of heavy clothing. The outer garments should be tightly woven and water repellent.
- Wear mittens, which are warmer than gloves.
- Wear a hat.
- Cover your mouth with a scarf to protect your lungs.

3) Traveling with caution

- Have your car winterized and make sure it is working properly.
- Install good winter tires. Make sure the tires have adequate tread.
- Augment your car's emergency supply kit with a shovel, windshield scraper and blankets.
- Maintain at least a half tank of gas during the winter season.
- Check road conditions before departing.
- Let others know of your route and your estimated time of arrival.

4) Recognizing symptoms of exposure

- Confusion, dizziness, exhaustion and shivering are signs of hypothermia. Possibly: if you experience any of these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.
- Gray, white or yellow skin discoloration, numbness or waxy skin are symptoms of frostbite. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek immediate medical attention.
- In the case of overexposure to freezing temperatures, remove wet clothing and immediately warm the body with a blanket or warm fluids like hot cider or soup. Avoid caffeine or alcohol.

For more information on preparing for emergencies, visit the Governor's Office of Emergency Services Web site at www.oes.ca.gov. For health-related information, visit the Department of Health Services Web site at www.dhs.ca.gov.